

THE VOICE

MAGAZINE

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Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Convocations past and future

Hobbit Habitat

Fiction vs. reality

Day & Light

Coupled

*Plus:
In Conversation With
From Where I Sit
and much more!*



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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indicate if we may publish your letter.



WHAT LIES AHEAD: CONVOCATION, TICKET TO THE FUTURE

Christina M. Frey



Graduates wait for Convocation ceremonies to begin in Athabasca, Alberta, this past June.

The start of school is around the corner, and most students are looking ahead with a mix of nervousness, anticipation, and hope. Planning, dreaming, and perhaps worrying have been occupying much mental space in the past few weeks. Yet sometimes the best way to pave the way for a smooth start to the academic year is to do the opposite of future-thinking: looking backward.

This past June, over 1300 Athabasca University students were awarded degrees during AU's annual Convocation ceremonies. Because the AU student

body is so geographically, ethnically, and socially diverse, each member brings a different story, a different struggle, a different success. But despite their different paths, all the graduates were similar in one aspect: a determination to follow their educational dream, no matter where it might lead them.

In the end, they were united by a common success. Graduation is a celebration of that achievement, but it's also an inspiration for current students, whether they're just starting out, slogging through the middle of their course requirements, or coming into the homestretch.

The journey of a distance learning student can be a lonely one at times. In a school whose student body is so geographically widespread, it's often hard to feel part of something bigger. This isolation is especially keenly felt when the going gets tough.

Lisa Priebe, a psychologist and AU alum who graduated several years ago, offers some hope. At this year's Convocation, Lisa received a unique honour: she was awarded the Order of Athabasca for her outstanding contributions to the school, including several terms as AUSU president. She is the first former undergraduate student to have been inducted into the Order.

Initially, involvement in the school wasn't a goal Lisa was seeking. She "just wanted a degree," she notes, but when a slowdown in her schedule led to her running for AUSU Student Council, "everything changed."

It wasn't just her social relationship with other councillors and her student constituents that made a difference. Working closely with students and administrative personnel on policy matters helped Lisa create a bond with her alma mater, one that many students have trouble accessing. AU and its people are now like family to her—"I now have a real attachment" to the institution, she says.



Sense of community: staff, graduates, and family and friends socialize during Convocation weekend, June 2011.



Lisa Priebe is inducted into the Order of Athabasca during Convocation ceremonies, June 2011.

More importantly, though, working with the school opened up new horizons for her, taking her places she'd never dreamed she'd go.

"It changed my life," Lisa says candidly. She's amazed by the skills she gained during her involvement with AUSU, but even more by the opportunities it created. For example, while business and management were never areas of particular interest to her, working on Council taught her things which proved invaluable when she was ready to open her private practice: "Starting out . . . was not intimidating," she says.

Even better, it created possibilities for the longer term. Service "expanded my horizons in what I want to do," Lisa

says. Exposed to situations and skill sets that were outside her familiarity zone, she was able to view organizations and future plans in the light of her new experiences. Working with the school "can really change how your life goes and have a huge impact after you go," she says.

This year, if the solitary aspect of distance learning looms large, consider making AU a bigger part of your life. Although not everyone can be elected to Council, there are committees that are always in need of help, even if you only can give a few hours a week.

Getting involved can seem like a hassle, particularly when graduation still seems so far off. But sometimes, taking that first step is key to transforming the future. After all, good things come to those who wait. But great things are waiting for those who are willing to pursue them!

CLICK OF THE WRIST

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Did you miss the 2011 Convocation? Want to reminisce over a past year's ceremony? Wondering what you need to do to graduate in 2012? Check out these links and discover Convocations past and future.

Watch It Happen: If you'd like to watch footage of past Convocation ceremonies, or view photo albums, be sure to check out AU's Convocation page. Although footage of the 2011 Convocation isn't yet available, you can get a taste of the atmosphere by viewing images and video from prior years.

Attention Alumni: Did you graduate this summer—or a few years ago? Check out AU's Alumni page, where you can discover upcoming events, alumni services, and even learn about what fellow alums are doing.

Looking Ahead: If you're hoping to graduate next June, give yourself a head start by checking out the Registrar's Convocation page. It answers frequently asked questions on the graduation application process and lists Convocation requirements and procedures.

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman

**hue, Part I***"Where you goin'?"**Where you comin' from?**Where you runnin' to?**Where you go I will, I will follow.**When you grow, I will, I will also."**from Starting Fires, "The Bump"*

hue is a Toronto-based indie band noted for its enthusiastic pop rock tunes, superlative sound production, and creative collaborations with a host of stellar acts (including Timbaland, We Are Wolves, The Wooden Sky, Two Hours Traffic, Said The Whale, Hollerado, Lights, and Mother Mother). *Starting Fires* is ***hue***'s second full-length album. Recently the band's leader, singer, and songwriter Danny Paton, Jr., took the time to answer some of Wanda Waterman's questions about band history, inspiration, and creativity.

Regarding *Starting Fires*

We approached this album from a whole different perspective than the last. Working closely with Mike Tompkins, we took our time and absolutely pushed ourselves to make a bright, solid record in our eyes.

We wrote as a five-piece instead of three, having Jess Paton as a fresh female presence and innocence in the writing. Andrew Jones brought a different musical taste and fire to the songs, changing the direction in the best ways possible.

Feeding the muse

We all feel that as long as we aren't being told how to create by anyone but ourselves, then we will be open and happy creating, writing, and laughing together. Hearts full and lost have only inspired and brought us to the places we are in life and with our music.

Has the creative life changed you?

Definitely, yes. You are able to let your emotions and hard work out into the world, and by hearing and seeing feedback from people, it drives us to keep going and sharpen our game.

Inspiring music

Plans by Death Cab for Cutie is a colossal album



throughout the band. Front to back the album is incredible. We are inspired by a lot of Canadian music such as The Tragically Hip, Joel Plaskett, [and] Attack in Black, all of whom we look up to and aspire to end up like.

Regenerating

We rely a lot on the friendships we've created within the band. We are the closest, best friends in the world. An agreeable laugh here and there easily brings us back to reality and helps reboot ourselves. We are also all very lucky to have wonderful families who fully support what we do.

Coming together

Darcy, Andrew, and Danny started playing together in high school, and it was a three-man show for a few years. After moving to Toronto the band sought a larger sound, and found Andrew Jones at a local bar. We asked him to be in the band and take over bass from Darcy, who then moved to guitars and piano.

Danny asked his sister Jess in December 2009 to sing and play synth in hue after she sang on a few early demos with the band. The sound was fuller than imagined, and the new hue was born.

Writing songs

It usually starts from an idea, with Danny and Darcy coming up with a melody or progression on acoustic or piano. We bring it to the band and jam out parts and piece it together, jumping from instrument to instrument between us.

To be continued . . .

DID YOU KNOW?

AU's Advising Services

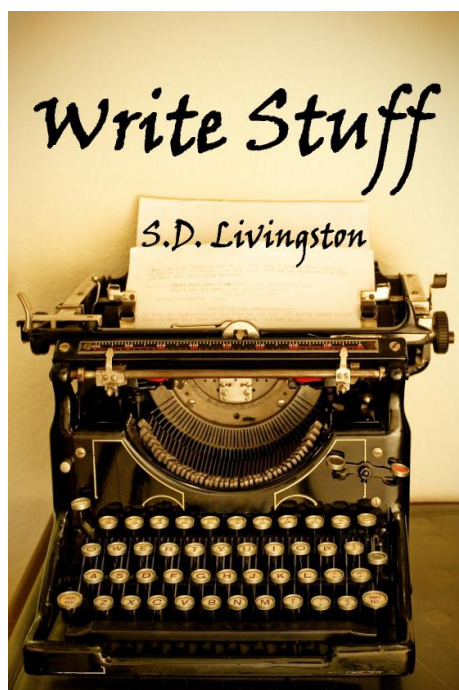


For first-time students, program selection and planning is a significant undertaking. But even if you're well on your way to earning that degree or certificate, it's important to revisit and revise your program plan continuously as circumstances and interests change. There's no better time to put it all together than back-to-school season!

Although all the prerequisites, program requirements, and transfer credit rules can be confusing, AU's [Advising Services](#) is there to help.

The advisors, who are available by phone, email, and in person at one of AU's Centres, "can assist you in areas ranging from clarifying your undergraduate program requirements, to helping choose the next course for your program of studies." They also can answer your questions about "university regulations and procedures" as well as "transfer credit evaluation." Special academic advising is also available for specific programs.

For more information, visit the [Advising Services page](#), or fill out the [online contact form](#).



Stranger than Fiction

Truth might be stranger than fiction, but what happens when fiction meets reality? Or, to put it another way, how far would you go in your devotion to your favourite fiction? Sure, people camp out for days to get concert tickets, but there's no shortage of diehard fans in the literary world, too. If you think your collection of *Twilight* novels is awesome, check out how far some folks will go to bring their much-loved fictional worlds closer to reality.

If you've ever wanted to step through a small, round door into a cozy hobbit house, you don't need to travel all the way to the Shire. A real Hobbit House awaits in northwest Montana, just a three-hour drive from Spokane, Washington. It's a 1,000 square foot hideaway built into the side of a hill, and the master bedroom even has a copy of Gandalf's pointy wizard hat.

The 20-acre property includes plenty of hobbit-sized magic, as this *New York Times* article explains: "a four-foot stump-shaped troll house, a few round-door hobbit houses with chimney pipes and several shoe-box-size fairy houses." And what would a hobbit house be without a gold ring hanging from the rafters? There doesn't seem to be a real-life Rivendell in the works, but that's no surprise. The Hobbit House alone cost its owners about \$410,000 to complete.

If Jane Austen and the Regency period are more your style, you're in good company. Each year, hundreds of fans from all over the world converge on Bath, England, for the Jane Austen Festival—and they take their Austen seriously. Promenaders in full period dress attend balls, concerts, and soirees, and the festival recently broke a Guinness world record for the "largest gathering of people in Regency costume" (the feat's available on YouTube). I'll admit, it was exciting to drive by Austen's former home on a recent trip to Bath, but creating a full historical costume—and wearing it for a week—takes a whole different level of commitment.

Some people prefer their literary recreations on a smaller scale: in some cases, just one room. That's what the enthusiasts at 221B Baker Street have built: "an authentic recreation of the famed sitting room of Mr. Sherlock Holmes." The room contains items specifically mentioned in various Holmes tales, including a gasogene (forerunner of the seltzer bottle) and microscope.

Getting the details right must have taken an astonishing amount of time, and a close second comes in the artwork of Russell Stutler. As he notes on his site, he "read the entire collection of sixty Sherlock



Holmes stories twice in a row, back to back, and took notes of every detail [he] could find.” Now that’s dedication.

And finally, for the gastronomically adventurous, you might be tempted to recreate the recipes in your favourite literary works. That’s what one *Sunday Times* columnist has been doing for years—not always with pleasant results. If you aren’t in the mood for some Dickensian gruel, there’s always the recipe for Henry Perowne’s Fish Stew, a questionable delicacy from Ian McEwan’s novel *Saturday*.

So the next time you return to a favourite series or find a fabulous new author, don’t worry that the fun will end when you turn the last page. Because some fan, somewhere, is sure to be hard at work on a life-size model of George R. R. Martin’s *Seven Kingdoms*.

CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

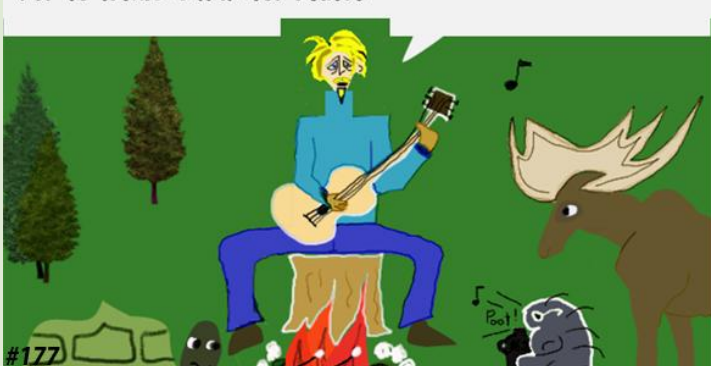
Wanda Waterman

There's a feller who's been provin'
That our lives 'll keep improvin'
Just as long as we keep jeopardizin'
Obstacles to enterprisin'

Chronicles of
Cruiscin Lan



There was a Russian writer, wrote a story of a blighter-
Bought dead serf slips from the nobles
For to trade 'em in for rubles



An' so we're stuck with borrowed time an' credit cards
an' corporate crime an' spendin' much as possible 'cause
We loves the Friedman gospel.



... from unsuspecting
neighbours in the market
for cheap labour, who
thought a stack of
fraudies represented
living bodies ...

Zat
true?

Dem
Russians,
dey
crazy
like a
bag o'
hammers.

How are we
any better?





From Where I Sit

Hazel Anaka

Savour the Goodness

Anyone paying serious attention to the news is likely to be calculating the shortest distance to the nearest bridge. You've got weather phenomena that are flooding, scorching, or rearranging the planet. You've got a human disaster unfolding in Africa; a financial crisis brewing in America, boiling over in Europe; and corruption and war in too many places to count.

Much closer to home you may be dealing with unemployment, crippling debt, ill health, or family breakup. The car won't start, the dog has fleas. Everywhere you turn there is decay and disintegration: things rusting, rotting, and becoming obsolete, and goods in need of refurbishing, updating, or replacement. There is no stasis. No rest for the wicked. The weeds are encroaching. The march of time is relentless and unforgiving.

That's why it is an act of self-preservation to look beyond the broadcasts, the fearmongers, the bank balance, and the mirror to find miracles and hope and blessed moments of joy and distraction.

That's why it is important to go to those events where family gathers. To hold a week-old baby and touch his unbelievably soft and perfect skin before eczema, mosquito bites, baby acne, and his first scrape do their damage. To sit with the 80-year-old aunt and hear her talk about her latest project, overseeing a home remodel. To hear a 25-year-old talk about her new man and listen to hear explain how she's so much more discerning now in the qualities she looks for.

It's important to bring flowers into our homes, to use the good dishes, to slather lotion on thirsty skin; these small acts remind us that little things matter. And we can also write a cheque to a charity, do a favour, and say a kind word; these small acts of giving help us as much as or more than the recipient of the kindness. We can take a moment to snap photos of four bull moose on the road in front of our house. And talk about them so others can picture the image and share in our delight.

Dreaming about and planning a kitchen redo is an act of faith. The messages are many: I can afford this; I will live long enough to enjoy it; it will make my life easier, my home more valuable; it will be an act of maintenance and modernization. Picturing the Norman Rockwell-esque family gatherings and visits with friends in the new space is the happy result.

We can seek escape from the daily grind in simple pleasures: a favourite author, a new (or classic) movie, a day of window-shopping. We can play hockey in a hallway with a two-year-old—and delight in the promise and potential of this young life.

I know some people who don't read the paper or watch the news because they say it's too depressing. I do both religiously, because it reminds me that without darkness there is no light. I can't notice and savour the goodness if I've insulated myself from its opposite, from where I sit.

THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

Film: *Another Year* (2010)

Writer/Director: Mike Leigh

Genre: Drama, Comedy

Cast: Jim Broadbent, Leslie Manville, Ruth Sheen

"For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness . . ."

1 Thessalonians 5:5

Among the most precious scenes in this film are the ones that show husband and wife Tom and Gerri working their little allotment of gardening space, adding compost to the raised beds, planting seedlings, and sitting together drinking tea in a little shed as they wait out the rain.

Then there's their house, whose refreshingly mishmash decor could not possibly have been staged. Filled with old odds and ends, it's cozy and welcoming, bright with warmth and fun.

The blessedness of Tom and Gerri's marriage is a bit of an anomaly in the movies (with the exception of some of Leigh's other films, notably *Life is Sweet*); the surprise element elevates the status of their union from the mundane to the mythic, and they end up looking like the Greek gods Hemera (Day) and Aether (Light).

Their relationship seems effortless; they fall quite naturally into a series of words and gestures which affirm, uplift, and instruct each other and by extension those around them. Their mutual love lights up every room in which they appear together. But the effectiveness of Tom and Gerri's unconditional positive regard is often wasted on the pilgrims who come their way.

There's the intensely neurotic Mary, for example, who works as a secretary in the clinic where Gerri practices as a counselling psychologist. Mary is a portrait of the process of alienation, adoring and grasping at Tom and Gerri as she slowly sinks into her own emotional maelstrom, overburdened by the anger and pain she refuses to release.

Abandoned by the men she loved, Mary is having a hard time growing older. She is intensely lonely and frustrated, but her manic flirting embarrasses everyone but herself. In a desperate effort to cling to life and to Tom and Gerri, she causes a great deal of awkwardness by hitting on their son Joe. She's openly disappointed and rude when Joe brings home a fiancée.

It's as if Mary wishes to be parented by Tom and Gerri, not just befriended, and union with their son seems the most desirable way of accomplishing this. When this doesn't work out she sets her cap for Ronnie, Tom's brother. But despite Mary's Herculean efforts she remains an outsider to the enchanted circle and can't seem to figure out why.

There is a pointlessness in her striving which is very similar to the religious struggles of those who would appease a God whom they see as angry and vengeful, but who turns out to be easygoing, tolerant, and forgiving.

And she's not the only unhappy person in Tom and Gerri's life. There's their slovenly friend Ken, who bemoans the fact that young people are now making him feel old and out of place in the pubs he once loved to frequent. There's Tom's brother Ronnie, a grey man in a grey suit in a grey apartment, someone who has spent his whole life unemployed and supported by his exhausted wife.

Together Tom and Gerri comprise a deity that balances judgment with mercy, practicality with high ideals, acceptance with boundaries. She tempers his quick and hilarious (but sometimes callous) judgments while he curbs her tendencies to bare her neck to the emotional vampires that flock to her.

Mike Leigh is a master of setting the tone of a scene with simple touches: a doctor's office, a depressed middle-aged woman, a brown hand, a patient manner, and a pregnant belly together conspire to make it clear (but not blatantly so) that this film is about life and death addressing each other and negotiating a kind of harmony.

"The blessedness of Tom and Gerri's marriage is a bit of an anomaly in the movies . . . the surprise element elevates the status of their union from the mundane to the mythic . . ."

On the surface the story doesn't appear to resolve itself tidily. However, there is something on Mary's face at the end of the movie that suggests that for her change is both necessary and inevitable—and asks if she's ready.

Another Year manifests 10 of the Mindful Bard's criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 2) it stimulates my mind; 3) it provides respite from a sick and cruel world, a respite enabling me to renew myself for a return to mindful artistic endeavour; 4) it is about attainment of the true self; 5) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 6) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 7) it gives me tools which help me be a better artist; 8) it gives me tools enabling me to respond with compassion and efficacy to the suffering around me; 9) it is authentic, original, and delightful; and 10) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

AUSU UPDATE: JULY 2011**Bethany Tynes, President****AUSU Joins ASEC!**

On Friday, July 15, AUSU was officially accepted into membership by the Alberta Students' Executive Council. ASEC is a provincial lobby group that now represents students from fourteen post-secondary institutes across Alberta, including schools from five of the six categories described in Alberta's Post-Secondary Learning Act. ASEC is focused on advocating on behalf of all post-secondary students at Alberta institutions, recognizing that each school has a unique student population and there is no such thing as a "normal" student. ASEC has recently been incredibly successful

in their efforts with government and media, having been the driving force behind the newly-launched Serving Communities Internship Program, which provides students with the opportunity to pay for their education through volunteer work. AUSU is incredibly excited to work with ASEC! For more information on ASEC, visit albertastudents.ca.

Meetings with CUPE 3911

CUPE 3911 is the union that represents our AU tutors, and for a very long time AUSU sought to meet with representatives from this union to discuss how we can work together to improve students' experiences at AU. A few months ago, we were delighted to have the opportunity to meet with members from the CUPE Executive, who expressed great support for students. Our AUSU Executive will now be meeting with CUPE on a quarterly basis to keep communication channels open and discuss our mutual concerns.

Relationship with AUGSA

AUSU is excited to see the growth and development that has happened in the AU Graduate Students' Association recently, and has also met with AUGSA to talk about how we can join forces to advocate on behalf of all AU students. AUSU will be meeting with AUGSA on a bimonthly basis from now on, with the two unions' presidents meeting on a monthly basis.

SmartDraw License Renewed

Did you know that as an AU student and AUSU member, you can get free software? SmartDraw is a design program that can allow you to create detailed charts and graphics. These can then be inserted into Word or PDF files or exported as JPG images so you can submit them to your tutor with your assignments! Contact our office to find out how YOU can download this program for free, and then let us know if it's useful to you! This is a program that AUSU has offered for a few years, but we have been informed that the price will be increasing drastically in the years to come. So check it out and let us know if it's a service you'd like to see continued, or if you'd rather we investigate other options.

This column is provided by AUSU to facilitate communication with its members. The Voice does not write or edit this section; all content has been exclusively and directly provided by AUSU, and any questions or comments about the material should be directed to ausu@ausu.org.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



At Home: Mad Plastics

During 2003's mad cow disease scare, the Canadian cattle industry was changed forever. Even eight years later, its effects are still being felt: certain parts of the cow, now considered a risk for passing on the disease, are discarded and sent to landfills. However, scientists are discovering a new use for the waste—and it's nothing similar to the initial product.

As the CBC [reports](#), University of Alberta biochemical engineer David Bressler has “figured out a way to transform cattle parts into plastic.”

The cattle carcass parts, which contain items like cattle brains and spinal cords, are broken down into their component proteins. Then, they're bonded together with a second chemical, whose effect is “much like the rungs joining two sides of a ladder.” The result: a plastic-like material whose “strength and flexibility can be adjusted by altering the number

of chemical steps joining the two sides.”

Formerly, the cattle parts were thrown away, but now the 5,000 tonnes of cow parts landfilled weekly can provide 3,500 “tonnes of raw material for the new plastic.” One person's trash truly is another's treasure!

Around the World: Gettin' Schooled

Putting facts to music isn't anything new—*Schoolhouse Rock!*, anyone?—but educational songs tend to be extras, supplemental material rather than teaching tools themselves. Not so in one New York City classroom: there, the music is front and centre, but in the end it's all about the lyrics.

As *The New York Times* [reports](#), the class, which preps students to take the Regents history exam that's required for graduation, uses urban music to get its message across. The instructors, who go by the rap handles Rabbi Darkside and M.C. Tingbudong, use lyrics that “contain . . . the vocabulary that [the students] need to pass their Regents test.” Students in the class try to “compete with one another to fill in the missing lyrics.”

The class is a project of the Urban Arts Partnership's Fresh Prep, which is “trying to help hard-to-reach students pass the history Regents tests.” For the many students for whom English is a second language, the vocabulary used in the tests creates a certain level of bias, one of Fresh Prep's instructors told reporters.

So far, the pilot program “has shown strong results,” even beyond the history test: students are improving their reading skills by working through the lyric-heavy songs. In the future, Fresh Prep hopes to unveil an English test prep program as well.

CLASSIFIEDS

Classifieds are free for AU students! Contact voice@voicemagazine.org for more information.

THE VOICE

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